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GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-fourth session
Item 43 of the provisional agenda*
THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 20 July 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to attach herewith a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, David Levy, presenting the new Government of Israel's determination to advance the peace process. In expressing the hope for renewal in the diplomatic arena, Israel's Foreign Minister also addresses the need to rectify the anomaly of Israel's standing in the United Nations system.

I should be grateful if you would have the attached letter circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 43 of the provisional agenda, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Dore GOLD
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/54/150.

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ANNEX

Letter dated 20 July 1999 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel addressed to the Secretary-General

As the new Israeli Government begins its term of office, I wish to emphasize this Government's determination, as well as my own conviction as Foreign Minister, to advance the Middle East peace process on all fronts. This is the most important mission facing Israel, and we see the achievement of a comprehensive peace as the key to prosperity for the countries and peoples of the region.

We face the challenge of shaping a new future for the peoples of the Middle East, who for many years have suffered from war and terrorism. It is my hope that in the very near future, we will witness the dawning of a new era of peace, security and life without threats or conflicts. The time has come for countries of the region to be able to revise their priorities and act to strengthen their respective economies and societies, without the shadow of threats and violence.

The negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as those between Israel, Syria and Lebanon, will not be easy. They will require a candid approach from the leaders of the region, and reciprocal concessions in complex and sensitive areas, related to a final status agreement and a determination of the permanent borders in the region. The lessons and experience gained to date in the peace process, which began at the 1991 Madrid Conference, as well as the achievements in this process until now, provide room for optimism.

In the coming months, the Government of Israel will move the negotiations forward. Prime Minister Barak has already met with a number of leaders in the region, and I am convinced that a basis will be created for the mutual trust that is so essential to progress.

On a practical level, our intention is to accelerate the diplomatic activities, through focusing on the implementation of the Wye agreement, the renewing of the final status negotiations with the Palestinians and the advancement of negotiations between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. We will be restarting the multilateral process, in which we will concentrate on regional aspects essential to the future of the peoples of the region. These issues include economy, water, environment, refugees and regional security.

We intend to carry out these negotiations in good faith, with the belief and confidence that we can achieve peace agreements with all our neighbours. We expect our peace partners to act in a similar way. It is true that one has to avoid building up exaggerated expectations, and this applies all the more when the gaps between the sides are still great. Nevertheless, a historic opportunity lies before us and we must take advantage of it. The burden of difficult decisions will fall upon the parties themselves. Nevertheless, we trust that the regional and international systems will respond and provide assistance and support for this political effort to achieve peace, and will help the parties overcome their mutual fears and anxieties.

Peace and security go hand in hand. There can be no progress in the peace process against a background of terrorism and hostile political activity, serving only to heighten mistrust. Peace agreements must provide security for all peoples of the region, thereby leading to the establishment of a stable, wide-ranging network of ties. Progress in the peace process will not be possible without the backing and support of public opinion and the societies at large. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to strengthen the confidence of the peoples of the region in the ideals of normalcy and coexistence, in an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation.

It is also our hope that in the months ahead, we can finally complete the normalization of Israel's involvement in the United Nations system. As you well know, Israel's exclusion from any regional group has deprived it of its right to be an equal participant in the United Nations system. It has, inter alia, prevented Israel from serving in the main United Nations organs, including the Security Council. It is our hope that you will continue to support Israel in correcting this anomaly.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you my hope that we are indeed witnessing the dawning of a new era in the Middle East, in which we will be able to announce the arrival of a comprehensive peace: there will be an end to wars, an end to violence and an end to terrorism, and the region will become a centre of regional and international development and cooperation.

(Signed) David LEVY
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Government of Israel

UNITED NATIONS **S**

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LETTER DATED 21 JULY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the letter dated 19 July 1999 from the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, addressed to you on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (see annex).

May I request your kind assistance in having the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Letter dated 19 July 1999 from the President of Georgia addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Government and people of Georgia, I want to express our gratitude for your continued efforts to help reach a comprehensive political settlement in Abkhazia, Georgia.

For six years now, the United Nations has been actively engaged in the peace operation in Abkhazia and has greatly facilitated the long process of achieving a peaceful resolution to this conflict. For six years the process of restoring the territorial integrity of Georgia has been under way with the United Nations and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General, with the Russian Federation as facilitators. However, this process has been plagued by setbacks which have seriously affected the social and economic conditions of the refugees and displaced persons. This was evidenced by the tragic events of May 1998, when more than 40,000 spontaneous returnees to the Gali region had to flee their homes for the second time, leaving behind nearly 100 dead and their property in ruins, property which had been rebuilt with the help of the international community.

Regrettably, the violence of Abkhaz separatists against the Georgian population still continues and seriously threatens the peace process. Particularly disturbing are statements made by the Abkhaz authorities alluding to the possibility of a recurrence of the type of events that occurred in May 1998. The separatists are planning to hold so-called presidential elections this autumn, and this clearly indicates that the influence of those forces that want to retain the status quo in the conflict zone remains strong.

Georgia fully supports the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russian operation in Kosovo under the Security Council resolution. We believe that only such decisive measures could have put an end to the tragic developments in that troubled region. Because the situation in Abkhazia cannot be fully equated to that in Kosovo, it would be difficult to apply the same peace enforcement mechanisms for its settlement. It must, however, be taken into account that both cases involve ethnic cleansing and ethnic-related violence. In Kosovo's case, the violence is carried out against the minorities, whereas in Abkhazia, however paradoxical it may sound, the source, rather than the target, of the violence is the ethnic minority, with the vigorous backing of outside forces. The causes behind both conflicts are also similar and are rooted in the totalitarian-communist past.

The fate of 300,000 refugees and displaced persons who have for six years been desperately waiting to return to their homes and the thousands of peaceful civilian casualties murdered by the separatists can be classified only as ethnic cleansing.

While the United Nations may not be able to carry out an operation in Georgian similar to the one in Kosovo, I do believe that the United Nations should assume a more firm and uncompromising position towards the separatists who have blatantly disregarded all the Security Council resolutions. It was the

refusal to comply with the decisions of the United Nations that necessitated the operation in Kosovo. International organizations must be unwavering to those who disregard the will of the world community.

I hope that the report you will be submitting to the Security Council on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, will make a harsher evaluation of the destructive policy pursued by the separatist Abkhaz regime, which continues to stall the process of the return of the refugees and displaced persons. The unilateral initiative of the Abkhaz leadership regarding the return of the refugees has consisted, up to now, only of empty words.

I also hope that you will actively support our appeal that in its resolution on Abkhazia, Georgia, the Security Council would warn the separatist regime that more drastic measures will be taken if they continue their non-compliance with the Council's demands, with regard both to the respect of the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Georgia, and to the immediate start of the safe and dignified return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes. The Council should also condemn as illegitimate the so-called elections, at any level, on the territory of Abkhazia, until the process of the return of the refugees and displaced persons is complete.

In its resolution, the Security Council should also take into account the final documents of the Budapest and Lisbon summits concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, stressing the fact of ethnic cleansing having been carried out against the Georgian population.

Let me reiterate that we do not call for a peace enforcement operation similar to the one that has been carried out in Kosovo. We remain committed to the peaceful settlement of the conflict. But if the resolutions of the Security Council do not provide a clear and firm assessment of the destructive policy of the separatists, we may not be able to further prevent spontaneous actions on the part of the refugees and the serious consequences for regional peace and security that such actions would precipitate.

The Council should consider as a matter of utmost urgency the full resumption of the functions of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) as provided in its mandate, including reinforcing the monitoring of the human rights situation. We view the full-scale UNOMIG operation as a necessary prerequisite for guaranteeing the security of the returnees. We therefore request you to renew the consultations on the proposals set out in your report of 11 May 1998 (S/1998/375) concerning the introduction of self-protection units. I also believe that the time is ripe to begin consultations on giving UNOMIG police functions as well.

I want to once again express our readiness to start, forthwith, a political dialogue on questions related to granting Abkhazia a high degree of autonomy within the Georgian State. In this regard, we would welcome it if you would work out a model for conducting Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations on the above issue.

I thank you for your consideration of these matters.

(Signed) Eduard SHEVARDNADZE

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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING THE CREDENTIALS OF THE DEPUTY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Pursuant to rule 15 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the Secretary-General wishes to report that he has received a note verbale dated 21 July 1999 from the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, stating that Mr. Gennadi M. Gatilov has been appointed deputy representative of the Russian Federation on the Security Council.

In the opinion of the Secretary-General, this communication constitutes adequate provisional credentials.

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